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ABSTRACT

This study profiles the leadership exhibited by secondary school administrators in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and contract schools serving American Indian students. Of 54 surveyed administrators, 44 percent completed a self-reported descriptive questionnaire and The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Indian and non-Indian administrators were remarkably similar on the descriptive questionnaire. The primary exception was that non-Indians have more teaching and administrative experience. Both groups envisioned themselves as instructional leaders, yet failed to spend an adequate amount of time in this area. Instead, they reported that they were much more involved in time-consuming managerial duties. The LPI yields scores in the areas of challenging, inspiring, enabling, modeling, and encouraging. Scores indicated that Native American and non-Indian principals were in the high category for inspiring and modeling. Native American administrators scored high in the area of challenging, while non-Indian administrators scored lowest in this area. Challengers seek new opportunities and are risk takers. Educational administrators in BIA and contract schools need to develop skills which empower the teachers and recognize the teachers' achievements (enabling and encouraging). Suggestions include: (1) pre-training and staff development for BIA and contract principals; (2) on-going performance evaluations; and (3) reduction of managerial paperwork. (KS)

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PERCEPTIONS OF BIA AND CONTRACT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TOWARDS BUILDING LEVEL ADMINISTRATIVE/LEADERSHIP ROLES: IMPLICATIONS FOR AT-RISK NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

American Indian youth are the largest at-risk group in the United States. This especially holds true for those Native American students in Bureau of Indian Affairs and/or Contract schools. This study addresses the type of leadership exhibited by secondary school administrators in these schools. Two instruments were utilized in the study. The first was a self-reported descriptive questionnaire. The second was a leadership style instrument. The impact of leaders in these schools directly relates to the at-risk issue among American Indian youth.

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INTRODUCTION:

The education of Indian youth in this country must become a paramount issue if Indian people are to survive and maintain their culture and identity. The education of these students becomes even more important when one considers the drop-out rate of the largest "at risk" group in this country. A special report published by Education Week (1989) estimated that an attrition rate of 29 percent to 50 percent of Indian students is the operational norm in schools primarily populated by Native Americans.

The same report also identified several other factors that dramatically impact the education of Native Americans. Most important among these are:

1) The suicide rate among Indian teenagers was the highest of any ethnic group;
2) Native American students were more often labeled as learning disabled or handicapped than other ethnic groups;
3) Poverty and unemployment among Native Americans on reservations were among the highest in the country;

4) Indian students had a greater than average probability of being from a one parent family as well as a greater likelihood of having under-educated parents; and

5) Finally, Native American students manifested health problems than did any other ethnic group in the United States.

A recent BIA study also documented some of the extensive problems that exist in reservation schools. This study, titled Report on BIA Education (1988), found that approximately 29 percent of American Indian and Alaskan Native sophomore students drop out of school. This figure was 11 percent higher than Hispanics and 12 percent higher than Black students (p. 136). This report also indicated that 48 percent of American Indian students cut classes. This figure, when compared to all other ethnic groups, also represented the highest of any group (p. 136).

Given this data, it is obvious that schools must do a better job of educating and assisting Native American youth. The building level administrator has been identified as one of the essential factors in the creation of a school that educates all of its youth (Leithwood and Montgomery, 1985; Lipham, 1978; Rutherford, 1985, and, Sweeney, 1982). Administrators must be leaders who understand how to establish educational goals; how to involve others; how to effectively

communicate; how to be informed decision makers; and how to consistently manifest proactive leadership postures (Croghan and Lake, 1984; Leithwood and Montgomery, 1982). The Bureau of Indian Affairs recognized the importance of the building level administrator when it stated, "The principal is the central figure in reversing the vicious cycle of low expectations, low achievement, still lower expectations and a continuing downward educational and psychological spiral" (Report on BIA Education, 1988, p. 185). It further reported that "some principals regard their role as an administrative caretaker rather than as the school leader in charge of instruction" (p. 185). Administrators today must be much more than caretakers and managers. The educational reform movement of the 1980's, typified by the quest for an effective school, has validated the influence of educational leadership on student achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Foster and Boloz, 1980).

The passage of PL 95-561 in 1978 placed greater responsibility on administrators in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools as well as tribally controlled contract schools for the establishment of an effective instructional environment (Boloz and Foster, 1980). According to the Education Directory of the Office of Indian Education Programs, (1988) there were "103 elementary and secondary schools...operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and 65 elementary and secondary schools...operated by Indian

tribes under contract with the BIA" (p.i.). The vast majority of these schools are in the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Minnesota although they operate in such diverse locations as Mississippi, Washington and Alaska. Typically these schools are rural, and are often found in a reservation setting, where social problems such as poverty, alcoholism and single-parent households abound. The isolation and ruralness of many of these schools affirms that the role of the school administrator is crucial to the success of the Indian student.

THE STUDY:

This study was conducted to gather data about the leadership exhibted in both BIA schools and Contract schools which serve as the primary educational delivery systems to Native Americans residing on reservations. This study was undertaken because of:

1) a concern regarding the quality of education Indian youth receive;
2) a desire to ascertain a general profile of the administrators in the identified schools,
3) an aspiration to determine whether or not differences exist between those schools where the administrator is Indian and those schools where the administrator is of another ethnic group; and,

4) a desire to further recognition of the impact of the building level administrator on at-risk students.

A survey was conducted with selected BIA and contract secondary school administrators throughout the country. A total of 54 surveys consisting of two separate instruments were mailed to administrators as identified in the Education Directory of the Office of Indian Education Programs, (1988). One instrument was a descriptive questionnaire consisting of 38 questions relating to demographics and various administrative duties and activities. The return rate for the first instrument was 44 percent. Although this rate was below what was originally deemed acceptable, it was decided to accept this when follow-up mailings and phone calls failed to generate additional responses.

The second segment of the survey was a leadership style questionnaire developed by Kouzes and Posner (1988) and used with their permission. This instrument, The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), consisted of thirty behavioral statements in which each administrator was asked to rate him/herself as to the frequency that he/she practiced the stated behavior. For instance a statement such as "I involve others in planning the actions we take" would then be followed by five Likert type possibilities ranging from "rarely" to "very frequently". Each answer was tabulated and correlated to

five leadership practices identified by Kouzes and Posner (1988). These practices were: 1)Challenging the Process; 2) Inspiring a Shared Vision; 3) Enabling Others to Act; 4) Modeling the Way; and 5) Encouraging the Heart. The higher the score in each of the five areas, the more likely one would exhibit the described leadership style. All questions were scored by a computer program developed by the authors of the LPI.

The reliability of the LPI instrument was addressed by Kouzes and Posner (1988) thusly:

> First, the LPI has shown sound psychometric properties; each scale is internally reliable. That is, the items are highly correlated within each scale. Factor analysis indicate that the scales are generally orthogonal: they do not all measure the same phenomenon. Test-retest reliability is high. Second, results from the LPI have high face and predictive validity. The results make sense to people, and they predict high performing leaders as well as moderate and low performing ones (p.4).

They also indicated that scores on the self-reported version of this instrument "tend to be somewhat higher than scores on the LPI-Other" (p.5). The LPI-Other was not utilized because it would have involved identifying a number of specific teachers for each administrator surveyed. The return rate for the LPI questionnaire was 41 percent.

The data generated from the first questionnaire was reviewed for overall results as well as for any significant demographic differences between Native American and non-Indian administrators. The results of the LPI instrument were

examined comprehensively as well as for any ethnic congruency or incongruency.

Results:

The results of the self-reported questionnaire determined the following about the responding administrators:

1) Eighty percent were male and 20 percent female;
2) The typical administrator had been a classroom teacher for 7.38 years before becoming a principal;
3) The average length in administration was 11.71 years;
4) The average tenure as an administrator in either BIA or Contract schools was 5.68 years;
5) The average length of time served as an administrator in their current school was 5.4 years;
6) The average age of the respondents was 40-45 years old;
7) Of those responding, 38.5 percent were Native American while 61.5 percent represented other ethnic groups;
8) Sixty-three percent of the respondents were reared more than 100 miles from their current school;
9) The average principal indicated a diverse educational background with 63 percent holding either a specialist or doctorate degree; and,
10) Only 8 percent of the respondents would not elect to become an administrator again if given the choice.

Typical administrators indicated they arrived at school approximately 40 minutes early and stayed at least one hour past the close of the school day. None of the respondents indicated teaching duties but 8 percent also served as an athletic coach. Fifty-four percent attended one to two extra-curricular activities weekly while 33 percent were present at three to four activities each week.

The typical administrator claimed a high visibility in the cafeteria, the teachers' lounge, and the halls of the school. Sixty-seven percent stated they spent time in a teachers classroom once a week or less often. Seventeen percent indicated they did not visit classrooms, even monthly and only 13 percent were in classrooms on a daily basis. Weekly faculty meetings were reported as the normal means of communication for 58 percent of the principals. The remainder of the respondents held either biweekly (23 percent) or monthly (15 percent) faculty meetings. The principals also revealed that 92 percent of them attempted to praise their teachers, and the primary delivery mode for this praise was verbal. Twenty-five percent wrote personal notes although none indicated ever placing a laudatory note in a teacher's personnel file.

In the area of staff development, 96 percent indicated regular attendance at such activities, while 81 percent reported they conducted staff development activities for their teachers. Regular attendance at professional conferences was

reported by 66 percent of the respondents; however, 4 percent indicated they had not attended a session in the past year. All but 19 percent had attended some type of national professional convention with 20 percent having attended more than three during his/her career. Forty-four percent indicated they had read between one and five of the national reports on education while 36 percent had read between five and ten.

When the respondents were asked to identify their primary responsibilities, 57 percent viewed instructional leadership as their first priority. Twenty-three percent of the respondents reported that their primary role was manager, and the remaining 20 percent were evenly split between discipline or other as their primary responsibilities.

Further examination of the self-reported data does not support the espoused instructional leadership assertion. When asked to estimate the percentage of time spent on a daily basis in four areas, the averaged responses were as follows:

51.68 percent on general managerial duties,

21.3 percent on discipline,

16.4 percent on working directly with teachers,

and

8.12 percent on meeting with parents.

The data suggests that the principals responded to the desire to be an instructional leader but acted primarily as managers. Instructional leadership necessitates an

understanding of what happens in teachers' classrooms yet only 13 percent were in classes on a daily basis. As stated, 17 percent were not in classrooms even on a monthly basis. An active role of instructional leadership is simply not supported by the data.

Ethnic Differences:

The collective data was also reviewed for any leadership differences between Native American and non-Indian administrators. As previously stated, 38.5 percent were American Indian while 61.5 percent of the administrators were of other ethnic groups. Of those who indicated they were Native American, the majority were three quarters to full blood quantum. Few differences, other than ethnicity and degrees of experience, were found between the two groups.

1) Native Americans had taught for an average of 5.6 years prior to becoming an administrator while non-Indians had taught for an average of 9.1 years,
2) Native Americans had 8.2 years of administrative experience compared to 14.1 for non-Indians,
3) American Indians averaged 4.9 years as an administrator in BIA or contract schools and 3.5 years in their current schools. Non-Indians averaged 6.2 years in the BIA or contract schools with 6.7 years in their current settings.

4) Thirty percent of the Native American principals were female while only 13 percent of the non-Indians were of this gender, and,
5) Eighty percent of the Indians held weekly faculty meetings while only 46 percent of the non-Indians did so.

Perhaps the most significant aspect in the comparison was not the number of overt differences but rather the degree of homogeneity between both ethnic groups in the daily operation of their schools. An identical 55 percent of Native Americans and non-Indians identified instructional leadership as their primary job. Both groups indicated that the majority of their daily routine was consumed by general managerial duties. Discipline and contact with teachers were ranked as second and third respectively in terms of amount of time allocated to these activities. The reported time spent in individual classrooms also was very similar, except that 33 percent of the American Indians were in classes monthly or less often while only 6 percent of the non-Indians fell into this category. Each ethnic group reported practically the same level of involvement in activities such as local staff development, attendance at state and national meetings, and pursuit of degrees of higher education. More Indians (40 percent) reported holding the doctorate than did non-Indians (4 percent).

Both ethnic groups were remarkably similar. The primary exception was that non-Indians have more teaching and administrative experience. Both groups envisioned themselves as instructional leaders yet failed to spend an adequate amount of time in this area. Instead they reported that they were much more involved in time-consuming managerial duties. Finally, the degree of homogeneity between the two groups indicated that the school as an institution remained singularly similar, regardless of whom the building principal was.

Leadership:

Responses to the LPI instrument consisting of thirty self-rated responses provided further insight into the leadership of these principals. The primary questions to be answered were:

1) Given the five areas to be scored (Challenging, Inspiring, Enabling, Modeling, Encouraging), what areas would represent the strength of these administrators?
2) Was the leadership exhibited by Native Americans significantly different from that of their non-Indian counterparts?
3) Did either of the ethnic groups score in the high category on the LPI Instrument?

Although the individual respondents showed some variation in leadership on the LPI, overall, there again was a degree of congruency. Both groups of administrators, Indian and non-Indian, scored in the high category for Inspiring and Modeling. Scores at the 70 percent level or better were considered to be high. Scores between 30-69 percent were medium and scores less than 30 percent were low. The Indian administrators also scored above 70 percent in the area of Challenging. Both groups scored in the moderate range in Enabling and Encouraging.

CHART 1 ABOUT HERE

The scores on the LPI indicated that Native American and non-Indian principals were in the high category for Inspiring and Modeling. Leaders who inspire are those who are able to develop a vision of a desired future, are good communicators, and develop a degree of commitment to the vision. As modelers, they understand their values, are good planners, and established organizational expectations (Kouzes and Posner, 1988). The Native American administrator perceived him/herself as especially strong in the area of Challenging while the non-Indian administrator perceived this category as his/her lowest

area. Challenging, according to Kouzes and Posner (1988), represented the desire to "seek out new opportunities" as well as a "willingness to change the status quo" (p.2). Challengers are risk takers.

Both ethnic groups were in the moderate range in the areas of Enabling and Encouraging. Enabling is symbolized as the development of collaborative goals through the active involvement of others in the planning process. Kouzes and Posner (1988) also defined Encouraging as the ability to recognize individual contributions to the organization, to establish goals, and as the leader's ability to praise those contributors for their efforts. The moderate score in these areas corresponded to the results of the self-reported questionnaire which established the failure of the principals to utilize their time as instructional leaders, although both groups identified this as an important goal. The focus on management of the school by both ethnic groups with minimal staff collaboration cannot help but hinder the creation of an effective learning environment. The administrators perceived an ability to inspire and model, and for one group to challenge, yet failed to enable their subordinates and sufficiently recognize them when they achieve. In other words, both the LPI and the demographic questionnaire indicated an ability to "talk the talk" but a failure to "walk the walk".

Conclusion and Implications:

The BIA and Contract school administrators appear to be individuals who are actively involved in a variety of daily activities, extra curricular events, and the constant maintenance of their schools. They are gratified as administrators and enjoy the daily challenges of the job. They actively seek to improve themselves and regularly participate in a variety of local regeneration activities as well as those offered at state and national levels.

They perceive themselves as instructional leaders but spend their days focusing on managerial duties or discipline. Their leadership indicates an understanding of what they wish to accomplish and a desire to set good examples by their visibility and involvement in various daily activities. Their daily focus on management and maintenance makes it difficult for them to be leaders who are collaborators, praisers, and shared decision makers.

Any expected cultural leadership differences between Native Americans and non-Indians simply failed to be manifested. Organizational maintenance appears to be the focus for both ethnic groups, although the Indian administrator appeared to be more willing to be a risk taker than his/her non-Indian counterpart. There are a variety of plausible explanations for this one major leadership difference. Culture may play a part, although, the answer may be that Indian administrators have

not been bureaucratically socialized to the extent of ntheir counterpart non-Indian administrators.

It is clear that one should not attempt to label the BIA and contract school principals as effective or ineffective, good or bad. They idealistically prefer to be instructional leaders but organizational obligations take precedence and control the focus of their daily activities. However, if the general belief, so readily espoused, that all students should be educated to the best of their abilities, is ever to become the operational norm in these schools, then it is imperative that educational administrators, develop skills that will allow students to achieve an optimum learning environment. This means that the administrator must not only recognize what it is he/she wishes to accomplish but also develop skills which empower others and which celebrate others' achievements. Only when principals become proactive leaders, and not managers, will the education of Indian children improve.

It is obvious that the maintenance of the status quo in BIA schools and within their leadership is unacceptable and unthinkable. Native American culture cannot continue to survive in any form unless students are able to master the social norms of America while valuing and preserving the practices of the traditional Indian way of life. The fact that 27 percent of the adult Indian population on reservations have less than an eighth grade education must be addressed so that

the cycle of educational failure is effectively remediated (Report on BIA Education, 1988).

Finally, given the nature, location, and clientele of the BIA and contract schools, administrators in these schools must be the best possible. It is crucial that leaders in these schools understand they hold the key to success for a student population that has been too often neglected and ignored. This necessitates skills and abilities beyond that of organizational manager. Whether or not administrators in these schools have those skills remains in doubt. It is an inescapable reality that both Indian and non-Indian administrators must be better prepared if Native American youth are to be successful participants in an increasingly complex world.

Training, selection, and staff development of administrators in BIA/Contract schools must address the following in order to effectively confront the problems found these schools. There is a need to:

1) Develop an extensive pre-training format for those who wish to become principals in BIA schools. This training must provide for an exhaustive assessment of each potential administrator as well as actively seek Indian educators who wish to be principals.

2) Develop a systematic staff development process for all administrators that is both sequential and incremental in design.

3) Establish an on-going performance evaluation process for current and future administrators which specifically designs an improvement process that meets their individual needs.

4) Reduce the managerial paperwork burden that the BIA places on each principal.

5) Develop a cultural understanding of specific tribal needs and expectations that exist at each BIA school before an administrator takes his/her position as principal. This should hopefully assist in reducing the high principal turnover found in many BIA schools.

6) Finally, actively train each administrator in the concept of developing an educational vision and how to set goals in order to achieve this vision.

Then, and only then, will the needs of American Indian students be addressed by well-informed and trained school administrators.

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